

**Testimony Regarding Support for HB 5283 & SB 229 and
School Construction Funds for Public Charter Schools
March 4, 2022**

Co-Chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez and other distinguished members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Claudia Phillips I am a Bridgeport resident, mother of three kids, now young adults who attended traditional, magnet and charter schools.

You have heard me talk about my twin daughters and my son before; they are my pride and joy as am sure I, your children are yours!

They, like many of our youth, are struggling to move forward after experiencing one of the most frightening and paralyzing moments of their lives due to the pandemic and its aftermath. They are resilient but our elected leaders need to support them.

I am the voice of the families in Bridgeport who as elected leaders, you have pledged to serve. We have put our trust in this leadership, and gone on working daily to support our families. Our message to you today is about doing everything we can as a village to bring back hope to our youth and our communities, again!

This past February 9th I watched with anticipation and joy as Governor Lamont spoke with vigor and excitement about our state and in particular about education. He said we were a shining example to follow in our country. I remember him saying how important it was to him to provide a foundation for our youth to become our state's future leaders. He spoke about the gratitude he had for educators... and then came the budget. The budget did not address our state's broken funding system or remedy the inequitable funding that disproportionately hurts districts largely serving students of color. The budget did not fully fund our existing public charter schools and it did not include funding for a Danbury charter school. Governor Lamont's words felt so empty- and now I turn to you because we can not continue to ignore the monumental needs in the educational sector, especially now that we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to close the funding gap.

Year after year the education and opportunity gap grows and we are plagued with crime and many other challenges that overwhelm our communities by design. For far too long my children, our children have been told that there is simply not enough money to address the alarming economic and racial disparities that plague their education. We have been treated like second class citizens. Now there is enough money to go around, why wait? Why must our children be the ones who defer their dreams?

With the education policy this Committee could pass this year, we have an opportunity that we may not have again to change the course of our history by becoming a true example of a state that invests in its most important and precious resource: its youth! **Help us to bring forth the changes needed specific to the way we fund kids' education- from a broken system to**

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one that brings equity to all regardless of where that child lives or their socioeconomic status.

I ask you for your leadership in three areas this year:

First, I implore you to pass a bill that funds our children based on their learning needs. Our students should not have to continue to wait to receive the education funding they need and deserve. This year we can actually close the most staggering racial/educational gap- we can not allow this opportunity to pass us by, we have a duty to make it better for our children.

Second, please ensure public charter schools have access to facilities funding or school construction funding. A public charter school in my community was promised nearly \$1 million dollars in 2018 for facilities related projects and that money has still not been sent by the state. It has been 4 years! We have endured a pandemic since then which has tested our school buildings. We have waited patiently for the funds we have been promised. Our public charter schools are continually contending with facilities issues like leaking roofs, sewage backing into them, broken furnaces and they do not get a red cent to address these issues, ultimately culminating in the loss of learning for students who have already been through enough.

Third, I am here in support of Senate Bill 229. The process to open new public charter schools is broken. Since 2012, I have been working with families from my community to fight for schools that will meet their children's needs. But in 2015, the law was changed and created an impossible process that has removed the state board of education's authority to grant charter schools. The current process prevents communities and families from accessing quality schools they have arduously fought for and need for the betterment of their children's future. It wastes resources that could, and should be put toward serving our children because that is who this should really be about.

We must fully fund ALL public schools, including our state's 21 public charter schools, now, and finally provide students and teachers in underserved communities across the state with the resources they need, including school construction.

I'll end with this, I want to always inspire our kids-that there is a future that holds promise and hope for them. I therefore can not be complicit and stand by allowing decision makers to ignore the children they pledge to support especially now that we have the funds to do so. I ask you today to unite with me and the thousands of families who await for their chance to have actual promise and hope for their children.

Please support HB 5283 & SB 229 and ensure public charter schools have access to **school construction funds**.

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God bless you all, thank you.